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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DAILY CABLE

Thursday 30 March 1978 CG NIDC 78/074C

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NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION  
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ARAB STATES: Solidarity Moves

[redacted] *The Arab League Foreign Ministers, meeting in Cairo this week, have renewed the mandate for the Syrian-dominated Arab peacekeeping force in Lebanon and called for Arab solidarity. An editorial published last week by an authoritative Syrian newspaper suggests that Syrian President Asad is cautiously preparing for a reconciliation with Egyptian President Sadat.*

[redacted] Only 17 of 22 members were represented in Cairo--Syria, Algeria, Libya, South Yemen, and Iraq boycotted the meeting to protest Sadat's peace initiative. The League renewed the mandate for Syria's peacekeeping force in Lebanon--scheduled to expire on 28 April--for another six months. Syria would have arranged with the Lebanese Government to keep its troops in Lebanon, but both Beirut and Damascus are more comfortable having the Arab League approve the presence of the Syrian troops in Lebanon.

[redacted] At Saudi Arabia's behest, the ministers appointed Sudanese President Numayri to head a goodwill committee to negotiate a reconciliation between Egypt and Syria as a first step toward convening an Arab summit conference. [redacted]

[redacted] Syrian President Asad will probably respond cautiously to Numayri's efforts. Asad will not want to appear to the Saudis to be the major obstacle to Arab unity by ruling out a rapprochement with Sadat. Asad, moreover, may be looking for a way to end the rift with Egypt.

[redacted] Romanian officials who spoke with Asad recently told the US Embassy in Damascus that he is ready to deal with Cairo once Sadat admits that Egypt's peace initiative has failed.

[redacted] An editorial in the authoritative Damascus newspaper *Tishrin* on 20 March noted that Israel had "missed an historic chance" for peace by failing to respond adequately to Sadat-- an indirect admission that his initiative, although naive, was a positive step. In a subsequent discussion with Embassy officials, the editor of *Tishrin* argued that Sadat had briefly raised Arab hopes for peace but that Israeli intransigence now required Arab solidarity.

[redacted] The editorial article may be another indication that Asad is preparing to mend relations with Egypt. Asad has refrained from responding in kind to Sadat's personal attacks on him. He remains convinced that the Sadat initiative is going nowhere and that ultimately Sadat will have to admit failure.

[redacted]

